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“Encores me frissonne et tremble le cœur dedans sa capsule”: Rabelais’s Anatomy of Emotion and the Soul

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This article examines the role of anatomical references in the representation of emotion and argues that they constitute textual markers of the Rabelaisian view of the relationship between the body and the soul, and the nature of the soul itself. By analyzing the ancient models of natural philosophy and medicine on which Rabelais draws — Galen, in particular — and by contextualizing Rabelais’s thinking within contemporary debates on the faculties of the soul, the article aims to shed light on his representation of the intersection between material and immaterial processes within the human body. Instead of trying to reconcile potentially contradictory aspects of these ancient models with the Christian faith, Rabelais’s prose is informed by an intuitive understanding of ancient philosophy. His exploitation of the Galenic concept of the animal spirits gives us invaluable insights into the influence of materialist representations of the soul on Rabelais’s thinking.

Cet article examine le rôle des références anatomiques dans la représentation de l’émotion et il propose qu’elles constituent les marques textuelles de l’opinion rabelaisienne sur la relation entre le corps et l’âme, ainsi que sur la nature de l’âme elle-même. En analysant les modèles anciens de la philosophie naturelle et la médecine — Galien en particulier — aux lesquels Rabelais fait appel et en plaçant la pensée de ce dernier dans le contexte des débats contemporains sur les facultés de l’âme, l’article vise à clarifier la représentation de Rabelais quant à l’intersection, à l’intérieur du corps, des processus matériels et immatériels. Loin de tenter une incertaine réconciliation entre les aspects contradictoires de ces modèles anciens avec la foi chrétienne, la prose de Rabelais porte la marque d’une compréhension intuitive de la philosophie ancienne. En particulier, l’exploitation de la conception galénique des esprits animaux donne un aperçu précieux sur l’influence des représentations matérialistes de l’âme dans la pensée de Rabelais.

The study of the representations of emotions in French Renaissance literary works requires that one leave aside the Cartesian approach according to which passions are essentially viewed as perturbations of the mind and of reason. An epistemological shift occurred in the course of the seventeenth century, whereby Descartes’s view of a clear separation between the body and the mind eventually replaced and obscured the more richly woven picture, presented by Renaissance physicians and philosophers, of a self that is both material and immaterial. David Hillman highlights succinctly the specificity of Renaissance anthropology in this respect:

Selfhood and materiality were ineluctably linked in the pre-Cartesian belief systems of the period, which preceded, for the most part, any attempt to separate the vocabulary of medical and humoral physiology from that of individual psychology. [...] When characters on the early modern stage speak of “my heart’s core, my heart of heart” or of the “heat of our livers” [...], we would do well to regard these as far from merely metaphorical referents, and to try to discover how they figure into an overall understanding of bodily—and therefore psychological—interiority.¹

In the epistemology of the Renaissance, references to physiological aspects of emotional processes, when they are mentioned, cannot simply be considered to be poetic or rhetorical figures. Such references usually occur in the context of discussions of processes described by humoral medicine and serve to highlight the enduring attraction of these intuitive ancient descriptions and the keen interest aroused by the rediscovery of their sources, in particular in ancient Greek texts, by contemporary humanists. Rabelais’s text clearly reflects the powerful hold that humoral medicine retained over Renaissance thinkers and writers in the first half of the sixteenth century. In a recent study,² Emmanuel Naya highlighted the prevalence of the model of humoral psychology in Rabelais’s characterization and shows that, for all their narrative complexity, his characters possess “complexions” that follow closely the classic canons of ancient psychology and psychopathology. From Panurge’s melancholy to Frère Jean’s sanguine disposition, characters in Rabelais are described and react according to well-established humoral models that draw on Galenic and Hippocratic sources.³

However, Rabelais’s psychological description of characters does not rely exclusively on the exploitation of the norms of humoral medicine. The accounts of characters’ emotional experiences are nearly always accompanied by a detailed anatomical description of the physiological processes that explain these emotions. Rabelais uses his knowledge of human anatomy in his descriptions of emotion to bring to the surface of the text invisible processes within the usually

1. David Hillman, “Visceral knowledge,” in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. D. Hillman and C. Mazzio (London: Routledge, 1997), 81–106, 83.

2. Emmanuel Naya, *Rabelais, une anthropologie humaniste des passions* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

3. See notes 45, 46 and 58 for detailed references to Rabelais’s main Hippocratic and Galenic sources.

hidden organs in which they originate, peeling away the skin of his characters to reveal the inner workings of their body in a way no anatomist ever could: that is, as they happen in the living and breathing body. Yet surprisingly little has been said of the relationship between anatomical description of the body and the representation of emotion and the self in Rabelais's works.

As a writer of fiction who also happens to be one of the most respected physicians of his time, Rabelais's fascination with human anatomy pervades his text on many levels, manifesting itself, for instance, in the highly comical anatomical description of injuries on the battlefield, in Rondibilis's recourse to detailed description of female anatomy in the *Tiers Livre* in order to explain to Panurge the inevitability of *coquage*,⁴ and perhaps most famously, in the endless list of incongruous comparisons that make up the *Anatomie* of the unfathomable Quaresmeprenant in the *Quart Livre*.⁵

The anatomy of Quaresmeprenant offers an important insight into contemporary debates about the visible and the invisible in the human body, and the issues raised by the necessity to depict the anatomized body in order for anatomists to disseminate their findings. But its careful analysis can also help to gain a deeper understanding of Rabelais's ongoing medical and philosophical reflection on the relationship between the material and the immaterial in the human body. Much has been said of the endless lists of comparisons by means of which Xenomanes "anatomizes" this monstrous personification of fasting. Anatole Le Double's painstakingly researched and beautifully illustrated study of Rabelais's analogies aimed to show that the shapes of the everyday objects to which Xenomanes compares Quaresmeprenant's organs do correspond, to a certain extent, to the actual shape of these organs.⁶ But Marie-Madeleine Fontaine much more convincingly showed that the heterogeneity of the list of comparative terms points to the essential playfulness of the chapters that should be read in the context of contemporary debates on the use of comparison in medicine, and in particular as a central dimension of Galen's scientific

4. *Tiers Livre*, 32 (454). Rabelais's books will be quoted according to Mireille Huchon's edition, *Cœuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); citations in the notes will appear with chapter number(s) followed by page number(s) in parentheses.

5. *Quart Livre*, 30–32 (608–15).

6. Anatole-Félix Le Double, *Rabelais anatomiste et physiologiste* (Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1899).

enterprise.⁷ Paul J. Smith showed that these debates had opposed supporters of anatomical illustrations, like Vesalius, to reluctant anatomists who feared that the use of illustrations would lead some of their colleagues to shun dissection and the direct experience of the anatomized body. He very convincingly demonstrates that “the anatomy of Quaresmeprenant should be read meta-discursively as a humorous reflection on the possibility — and above all the impossibility — of medical and literary description.”⁸

The metadiscursive nature of the comparisons is perhaps best reflected in the particular delight that the author seems to take in the comic inclusion, within this most material description of the human body, of perfectly immaterial elements, like reason or imagination, or quasi-immaterial elements, like the spirits (*pneumata*), that could not be visible to the anatomist’s eye. If the reader can just about infer the shape of the tonsils from their comparison to “lunettes à un œil,”⁹ what is he/she to make of the comparison of the animal spirits to “great fist punches”? The animal spirits, which are credited in Galen’s physiological system with enabling the deployment of the faculties of the soul, can only be envisaged as an invisible movement within the living, breathing body,¹⁰ and the very idea of including them in an anatomical description represents a comically absurd impossibility. Beyond the comic intent, the reference in the anatomy of Quaresmeprenant to this most imperceptible and conceptual element can be read as a reflection on the author’s prodding of the intersection between the visible and the invisible in anatomical discourses.¹¹

7. Marie Madeleine Fontaine, “Quaresmeprenant: l’image littéraire et la contestation de l’analogie médicale,” in *Rabelais in Glasgow*, Proceedings of the Colloquium held at the University of Glasgow in December 1983, ed. James A. Coleman and Christine M. Scollen-Jimack (Glasgow, 1984), 97–98.

8. Paul J. Smith, “Dissecting Quaresmeprenant,” in *Dispositio: Problematic Ordering in French Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill 2007), 63.

9. See *Le Double*, 138–41, on the almond shape shared by both.

10. Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, ed., trans. and commentary by Phillip de Lacy, 2nd edition, augmented and revised (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), “Corpus Medicorum Graecorum,” part 2, book 7, 3, 29 (447): “we also learned that the psychic pneuma is neither the essence (οὐσία) of the soul nor its dwelling (οἶκος), but its first instrument (ὄργανον) from the fact that when the pneuma is let out through wounds, the animal immediately becomes like a corpse, but when it has been collected again, the animal revives [...]”.

11. Rabelais’s reflections can also be related to ongoing debates that started with the publication in 1521 in Bologna of Berengario da Carpi’s *Commentaria [...] Super anatomia Mundini*, in which he argues in favour of anatomy as *anatomia sensibilis*, freed from the eye of reason and its ability to imagine

The intersection between the material and the immaterial also lies at the heart of the representations of emotion in Rabelais's works. The anatomical details that accompany the description of the seat and the nature of emotion represent a striking and recurring feature of Rabelais's reflection on human psychology and constitute, as I shall argue, a significant marker of his conception of emotion and the self, a conception that is clearly steeped in his fascination not only with the usually hidden parts of the human body, but also with the mysterious relationship between the body and the soul, between the material and immaterial processes that combine to produce life in the body and whose intersection remains a subject of endless wonder for Renaissance anatomists. In the works of this "most zealous student of medicine," as Rabelais called himself in the ex libris of a Greek edition of Plato which he owned in the 1520s,¹² the presence of the human body — which has been opened to the gaze of the reader, which has, as it were, been dissected alive, in order to show the glorious beauty of life itself through the unseen workings of the organs — offers fascinating insights into Rabelais's representation of the self (both body and soul) and into the thinking of the author as natural philosopher.

The polysemy of anatomical references

If anatomy ranks as one of Rabelais's chief interests as a physician, it is also an extremely rich source of comic effects for the writer. Contemporary anatomists frequently discussed the errors of the Ancients in their anatomy lectures and treatises.¹³ Thus Vesalius criticizes the Ancients both in his public dissections and in the *De humanis fabrica*, which he published in 1543 and in which he demonstrates a number of errors in Galen's anatomical descriptions that were

the invisible. See Dominique Brancher's compelling study, "Un gramme de pensée," in *Poétique* 173.1 (2013): 3–26, 22.

12. See Robert Marichal, "L'Attitude de Rabelais devant le néoplatonisme et l'italianisme," in *François Rabelais, ouvrage publié pour le quatrième centenaire de sa mort 1553–1953*, ed. F. Michel (Geneva: Droz, 1953), 181–210, 183–84; see also Romain Menini, *Rabelais et l'intertexte platonicien* (Geneva: Droz, 2009), 72.

13. Fontaine interprets the fact that Quaresmeprenant is represented as possessing seven ribs as a direct reference to contemporary debates on Galen's anatomical errors, and in particular to his erroneous assertion that there are seven parts in the human breastbone, a conclusion that he too hastily drew from the dissection of a monkey. Fontaine, 95–98.

due in many instances to the fact that the latter dissected animals rather than human bodies, sometimes erroneously applying his findings to human anatomy.

In the Rabelaisian text, this subject is a mainspring of comedy. Roland Antonioli has shown how Rabelais's comic imagination is often prompted by a "rêverie in the margins of science,"¹⁴ the author exploiting the comic potential of certain misconceptions whose absurdity had been exposed by recent progress in medicine. Thus, Antonioli showed, in particular, how the anatomically impossible nature of Gargantua's birth can be linked to Rabelais's criticism of the description of the veinous system in Hippocratic texts, to which he himself referred in his edition of the *Aphorisms* in 1532.¹⁵

Rabelais's medical knowledge is also deployed to comic effect in the graphic descriptions of violence on the battlefield in *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. Characters are described in the heat of the action as living and moving "écorchés," the physiological impact of their attackers' blows recorded in exhaustive detail by the narrator as if he were lecturing in an anatomy theatre. The precise anatomical terms, coupled with the pedagogical approach of the description, lend a neutral, distanced quality to the narrative voice which contrasts sharply with the sheer horror of the narrated scenes. Thus, in *Gargantua*, chapter 13, the account of a blow that beheads the recipient takes the form of a detailed description that itemizes the effects of that blow on the different anatomical features and structures of the head:

Lors d'un coup luy tranchit la teste, luy coupant le test sus les os petrux et enlevant les deux os bregmatis et la commissure sagittale, avecques grande partie de l'os coronal, ce que faisant luy tranchit les deux meninges et ouvrit profondement les deux posterieurs ventricules du cerveau: et demoura le craine pendent sus les espaules à la peau du pericrane par derrière, en forme d'un bonnet doctoral, noir par dessus, rouge par dedans. Ainsi tomba roidde mort en terre.¹⁶

The violence of the blow is contrasted with the surgical precision of the description of the trajectory of the blade, which is reminiscent of the hand-movements

14. R. Antonioli, *Rabelais et la médecine* (Geneva: Droz, 1976), 86.

15. Antonioli, 85.

16. *Gargantua*, 44 (120).

of the anatomist detailing the different stages of a dissection for the benefit of his students. The arresting comparison drawn between the loosened skin of the skull hanging at the back of the head and a doctoral bonnet adds a further academic note to a description that might be read as a knowing nod to the atmosphere of the contemporary anatomy theatre, where humour must have been a welcome relief in the face of the grim reality of the dissected body.¹⁷ Similarly, the comically startling “Anatomy of Quaresmeprenant” in the *Quart Livre* is best understood in the context of contemporary anatomy theatre practice and the use of metaphors and comparisons usually based on considerations of shape or function and in which humour was an important part of the pedagogical process.¹⁸

Much humour is also derived from the evocation of the impact of emotions on the human body. Rabelaisian characters are largely defined by their humoral balance or imbalance which affects the way they react and deal with emotion: Pantagruel as the perfectly balanced, humanist king, who never lets his “affections” or emotions overcome or drive him, is contrasted with Panurge, prone to debilitating bouts of melancholy, resulting either in pathological indecisiveness or in paralyzing fear, or with the sanguine Frère Jean, who is characterized by his robust outbursts of cursing. As both Panurge and Frère Jean clearly demonstrate, the characters who are more prone to humoral imbalance have, because of their volatility, the greatest comic potential. And it is of course in the description of emotions that affect the lower part of the body (or *hypochondries*)—especially laughter, anger, and fear—that the most obvious comic effects are produced. The purging of the spleen, or *ratelle*, is a recurring motif in the Rabelaisian text—very often to be found in Panurge’s discourse—in references to either laughter or anger as ways of purging the *ratelle* of any dark and melancholic matter. This necessary “flushing out” of an organ that is considered to be central to a healthy balance of humours in the body can also be achieved through the ingestion of the “saulce vert” described by Panurge at the beginning of the *Tiers Livre*, which can “desopiler” the spleen.¹⁹ In the

17. See Baldasar Heseler’s notes on Vesalius’s sexual jokes during an anatomy lesson at Bologna in 1540, in *Andreas Vesalius’ First public Anatomy at Bologna, 1540*, ed. Ruben Eriksson (Uppsala and Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1959), 199–201.

18. See Michael B. Kline, *Rabelais and the Age of Printing* (Geneva: Droz, 1963), 49–50.

19. The linking of the idea of laughter with that of the purging of the spleen made its way into modern French in the adjective form *désopilant* (hilarious).

Cinquiesme Livre, in a chapter that Mireille Huchon considers to be Rabelais's work (albeit part of a series of earlier drafts that were not meant to be published as a separate fifth book), Panurge's excessive mirth is indicated in a phrase that is translatable as "to exert the spleen": "Panurge entra en joye tant excessive, et tant exerça sa ratelle, qu'il en eut la colique plus de deux heures." As Panurge recognizes during the storm in the *Quart Livre*, anger, like laughter, is to be seen as a healthy outlet for any harmful humours that may have been accumulating in the spleen.²⁰ Although, piqued by Frère Jean's ire at his cowardice during the storm, he admonishes the monk for the sin of cursing, he is also forced to concede that anger does benefit the spleen: "Car je croy que ainsi jurer vous face grand bien à la ratelle: comme à un fendeur de boys faict grand soulagement celluy qui à chascun coup près de luy crie 'Han,' à haulte voix."²¹ However, it is fear and its effect on the sphincter that particularly inspires the comic verve of the author. Faced with Pantagruel's exasperation at his attempt to hide his true origins behind an unpalatable Latin-based jargon, the "escolier limousin"²² "conchie" himself while finally blurting out a mercy plea in his native Limousin language. Likewise, Panurge's essential cowardice is manifested to all by the stench of his "chausses," during the storm in the *Quart Livre* and, again, when he refuses to disembark at Ganabin. While Panurge attempts to ennoble the nature of what he is feeling — referring to a compelling intuition that manifests itself as a strong movement of "retraction" in his soul — the loosening of his bowels, as Frère Jean concludes, shows that his behaviour is grounded in fear. The deduction that Frère Jean makes on the basis of the stench and colour of Panurge's "chausses" is reinforced by the narrator's addition of a detailed anatomical explanation that provocatively clarifies the medical term "sphincter" with a crude reference to the "trou du cul":

20. The references to anger in Rabelais's text have to be read in relation to Galen's *De Propriorum Animi Cujuslibet Affectuum Dignotione et Curatione*, which focuses on anger among the passions of the soul that Galen discusses in order to show how men can free themselves from the powerful hold of passions. See Galen, *Du diagnostic et du traitement des passions propres de l'âme de chacun*, in *L'âme et ses passions*, ed. V. Barras et al. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), 13–16. This French edition presents three Galenic treatises: *De Propriorum Animi Cujuslibet Affectuum Dignotione et Curatione*, *De Animi Cujuslibet Peccatorum Dignotione et Curatione* and *Quod Animi Mores Corporis Temperamenta sequuntur*.

21. *Quart Livre*, 20 (586).

22. *Pantagruel*, 7 (234).

La vertus retentrice du nerf qui restrainct le muscle nommé Sphincter (c'est le trou du cul) estoit dissolue par la vehemence de paour qu'il avoit eu en ses phantastiques visions. (...) Car un des symptomes & accidens de paour est, que par luy ordinairement se ouvre le guischet du serrail on quel est à temps la matiere fecale retenue.²³

Instinctive, immediate emotions like anger, fear, or indeed joy are always associated in Rabelais's text with a loosening movement in specific locations within the lower body; and, while these movements may result in undignified situations for the individual concerned, they are, nonetheless, presented positively because of the beneficial purging of the body that they afford, letting aggravating substances flow out of the body and thereby reinstating the humoral balance that is key to its health. However, emotions in Rabelaisian characters are not confined to these instinctive reactions that essentially affect the lower part of the body. Rabelais's representation of natural passions and emotion also reflects his knowledge of the hierarchy Galen establishes between the different parts of the body — a hierarchy inherited largely from Platonician philosophy and the theory of the three souls — with the liver and the spleen, situated within the hypochondries, as the seat of the most basic passions, the heart as the seat of more noble emotions, and the brain as the seat of reason.²⁴

The heart holds a central place in Rabelais's works as the location of deeply seated emotions, as is evidenced by Panurge, who, filled with anxiety at the thought of learning his fate through the interpretation of Virgil's verse, asks Pantagruel to measure the strength of his emotion by feeling the acceleration of his pulse in his left arm's artery, and by Gargantua, whose heart, as he reflects on his son's absence, is possessed with fear that some misfortune may befall him.²⁵ As Fay Alberti demonstrates,²⁶ until the late seventeenth century at least, the heart remains the main seat of the emotions in medical and philosophical treatises, and Rabelais's representation of emotion clearly reflects this. It is the same heart that Robert Burton, seventy years after Rabelais's death, still describes as

23. *Quart Livre*, 47 (698).

24. Galen, *Les facultés de l'âme suivent les tempéraments du corps*, in *L'âme et ses passions* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), 79–91.

25. *Tiers Livre*, 11 (384); *Quart Livre*, 3 (544).

26. Fay Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, Medicine, and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the “seat and fountain of life, of heat, of spirits, of pulse and respiration — the sun of our body, the king and sole commander of it — the seat and organ of all passions and affections. *Primum vivens, ultimum moriens*, it lives first, dies last in all creatures.”²⁷ But perhaps the most striking connection established between the heart and the experience of a deeply-seated emotion can be found in chapter 27 of Rabelais’s *Quart Livre*, in a vivid evocation of the circumstances surrounding the death of Guillaume du Bellay, Seigneur de Langey, Rabelais’s beloved protector and mentor. The scene becomes the focus of a discussion between Pantagruel and his companions on the subject of the death of heroes, and on the accompanying portents and signs that are sent to mortals from the heavens to warn them of impending catastrophe. As Pantagruel points out, on the demise of a hero the heavens “fright and astonish” men with “prodigies, monsters, and other foreboding signs.” “Of this,” Pantagruel adds, “we had an instance several days before the decease of the heroic soul of the learned and valiant Chevalier de Langey,” at which point his companion Epistemon exclaims: “Il m’en souvient (dist Epistemon) et *encores me frissonne et tremble le cœur dedans sa capsule*, quand je pense es prodiges tant divers et horifiques les quelz veismes apertement cinq et six jours avant son depart.”²⁸ The term “hero,” which refers to demigods or mortals deified after their death,²⁹ is applied here to Guillaume du Bellay, a great statesman and diplomat in the service of François I. A scholar and historian, he was a committed humanist whom Rabelais served as medical adviser and came to revere. His untimely death in 1543 was a severe personal blow for Rabelais, but was also seen by the author as a catastrophic event for the political future of France, such was the respect that he commanded.³⁰ The narrative passage itself is steeped in intertextuality. Previous studies have shown that the episode can be read as a narrative

27. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2001), part 1, section 2, subsection 4.

28. *Quart Livre*, 27 (602).

29. Ronsard gave the word its modern sense in 1555; see Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1998), 2:1711.

30. For a discussion of Du Bellay’s political role in Piedmont and the context of his death, see Victor-Louis Bourrilly’s biographical study: *Guillaume Du Bellay, Seigneur de Langey* (Paris: Société nouvelle de librairie et d’édition, 1905), 229–356; Richard Cooper, “Guillaume du Bellay, homme de guerre,” in *L’Homme de guerre au seizième siècle*, ed. G-A. Pérouse (Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, 1992), 31–50; Terence Cave, “L’ombre de Du Bellay,” in *Pré-histoires, textes troublés au seuil de la*

mise-en-scène of a letter by Marsilio Ficino on the death of Lorenzo di Medici:³¹ in this letter to the cardinal Giovanni di Medici, Ficino explains that great men are welcomed in the heavens by benign deities who manifest their joy in receiving them by sending signs and prodigies to the living. The clear parallel that the Rabelaisian text implicitly establishes between the Seigneur de Langey and the great Italian prince is a measure of his admiration for the man. The episode represents a rare instance in the Rabelaisian text where the narrator, by introducing into the fictional narrative a real, historical event, unexpectedly opens the text out onto a contemporary setting. The event concerned also happens to have been a deep personal experience for the author himself, who was present at the deathbed of his patron and protector. The scene is evoked in three different narrative episodes,³² an iterative pattern which is unusual in Rabelais and which, by the creation of a web of intratextual cross-reference, endows each episode with added significance. Emotion is intense in all three, but particularly so in the chapter under discussion here, where it is evoked through Epistemon's description of his own reaction to the memory of the event, a reaction that appears to be as powerful as the emotion felt at the time. As Terence Cave points out, the description in concrete, physical terms of a deep and complex emotion that was echoed by mysterious cosmic phenomena can be read as indicative of Rabelais's treatment of events that highlight the limits of human knowledge in the *Tiers Livre* and the *Quart Livre*:

À chaque moment, ce qui est en question est le site des clôtures épistémologiques et cosmiques, le point précis où l'on passe au-delà de la nature et de la connaissance humaine [...] à chaque moment, le texte bute sur une angoisse, une incertitude, une perturbation. Il ne s'agit donc pas d'une série de prises de position philosophiques, mais d'un effort pour faire des phénomènes limitrophes une substance tangible, les saisir à

modernité (Geneva: Droz 1999), 89–92. See also Emmanuelle Lacore-Martin, *Figures de l'histoire et du temps* (Droz: Geneva, 2011) 217–26 and 218n22 for further bibliographical references.

31. Jean Céard, *La Nature et les prodiges* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), 157. See also Huchon, who points to a passage in which Machiavelli refers to the calamities that followed the death of Lorenzo di Medici (*Œuvres complètes*, 1536–37).

32. *Tiers Livre*, 21 (416), *Quart Livre*, 26 (600) and 27 (602–03).

bras-le-corps. C'est dans cet effort que réside l'essentiel de l'épistémologie rabelaisienne.³³

Epistemon's remembrance provokes an intense emotion that is too vivid to be contained within the ventricles of the brain, but its enclosure in the pericardium maintains it at the higher level of powerful though restrained emotions that do not overpower the functions of the body. Furthermore, the emotion is based on a vivid memory and, therefore, involves the brain through the faculty of imagination, which is at the heart of the process of remembering. This is noted by Pantagruel in his letter to his father at the beginning of the *Quart Livre*, where the giant writes tenderly to his father about the pleasure he takes in reminiscing about him, as he embarks on a lengthy navigation at the beginning of the *Quart Livre*: "Et facilement acquiesçois en la doulce recordation de vostre auguste majesté, escripte, voyre certes insculpée et engravée on postérieur ventricule de mon cerveau: souvent au vif me la representant en sa propre et naïfve figure."³⁴ In this detailed anatomical description of the process of reminiscing, memory is precisely situated within the "posterior ventricle" of the brain, a thesis that is in keeping with a medieval tradition originating with the Church Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries who drew upon Galen's ideas. But the use of the term ventricle also creates an intriguing parallel with the reference to the pericardium in chapter 27: in both instances, the noble emotion evoked is fittingly contained within an enclosed chamber, a delimited anatomical space that appears to contribute to the positive connotations attached to the emotion thus represented.

The pericardium and the notion of enclosed emotions

The emotion described by Epistemon in chapter 27—an overwhelming feeling of awe and terror in the face of transcendent phenomena — is clearly presented as extraordinary, in keeping with the rare and outstanding nature of the events about which the character reminisces; and it appears that the noble nature of the character at the centre of the episode, the Seigneur de Langey, is fittingly honoured by the representation of a particularly remarkable and noble emotion,

33. Cave, 92–93.

34. *Quart Livre*, 4 (545).

which — though very powerful — would remain contained, as it were, within the envelope of the pericardium.

With this representation of the pericardium, Rabelais also appears to be drawing on a very ancient conception of an anatomical separation between the heart and the lower abdomen: Homer uses the word *phrenes* to designate the part of the body endowed with that function, a term that continues to puzzle translators and that has been variously translated as diaphragm, lungs or — interestingly — pericardium. In all cases, the idea is that of a separation between the lower, less noble part of the body and the heart, shielding the latter from the vapours produced by digestive and excretive functions. And the term *phrenes* in Homer has been shown to carry both a physiological and a non-physiological sense, pointing to an ambivalence regarding the distinction between the physiological and the psychological.³⁵ Rabelais's very specific use of anatomical detail in the description of an emotion can also be contrasted with the notable absence of references to emotion in the anatomical treatises of the period. For example, Charles Estienne's description of the distance between the pericardium and the heart contains a scientific description of the movements of the heart, but reference to the role of emotion is conspicuously absent: "Et n'est laissé cet intervalle pour autre cas que pour satisfaire à la dilatation dudict cœur: c'est a scavoir pour ne l'oppresser ou repoulsier quand il s'élargit ou amplifie."³⁶ The specificity of the reference to the pericardium in chapter 27 can also be highlighted by comparison with the only other passage in the text where the same anatomical reference to the pericardium, or "capsule" of the heart, can be found, albeit in a very different context. In *Pantagruel*, Panurge describes as follows a horrific killing he witnessed while he was a prisoner of the Turks:

[i]l luy passa la broche peu au dessus du nombril vers le flan droict, et luy percea la tierce lobe du foye, et le coup haussant luy penetra le diaphragme, et par à travers la capsule du cueur luy sortit la broche par le hault des espauls entre les spondyles et l'omoplate senestre.³⁷

35. On that ambivalence, which eventually led to the development of the meaning of *phrenes* as mind/spirit, see Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 46–50.

36. Charles Estienne, *La Dissection des parties du corps humain* (Paris: 1546), 227.

37. *Pantagruel*, 14 (264–65).

Here, the reference to the pericardium is secondary, subordinated to the comic function of the passage which derives — as in *Gargantua*, chapter 13—from the tension between, on the one hand, the profusion of anatomical details and the deadpan tone and, on the other, the horror and violence of the subject matter.

Thus, the narrative context and the narrator's attitude play an essential part in the shifting functions of anatomical references in the Rabelaisian text. In Epistemon's discourse in chapter 27, the pericardium takes centre stage: by locating — with the surgical precision of the anatomist's eye — the seat of the emotion within the character's body, the narrator gives concrete shape and form to the emotion. In contrast with the passages cited above, where characters are skinned alive both fictionally and textually and where the layers of the body are unceremoniously and mercilessly peeled back one by one, the narrator seeks to pinpoint a slight, almost imperceptible movement which is itself contained within a protective envelope; in this instance, the precise anatomical terminology used is all the more striking since there is no tearing or slitting of the body.

It is worth noting that the polysemy of these anatomical references has evidently been taken into account by early modern translators of Rabelais.³⁸ In both chapter 27 of *Quart Livre* and in the above example from *Pantagruel*, relating Panurge's experience at the hands of the Turks, Rabelais uses the term "capsule du cœur" to refer to the pericardium, a learned neologism which corresponds to the direct transcription into French of the Latin *capsula cordis*, which anatomists like Ambroise Paré, writing in the vernacular, gradually replaced with "péricarde" in anatomical treatises in the second half of the sixteenth century.³⁹ In 1653, Sir Thomas Urquhart, the first English translator of *Pantagruel*, rendered "capsule du cœur" with the slightly redundant "pericardium or capsule of his heart"; probably sensing that the term "capsule" might disorientate the reader, he offered a *doublet* as way of clarification, a stylistic effect often used by Rabelais himself when introducing neologisms or the novel use of a

38. There are two early modern translations of Rabelais's works into English: Sir Thomas Urquhart's translation of *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* was first published in 1653; in 1693, Peter-Anthony Motteux edited and published for the first time Urquhart's translation of the *Tiers Livre* and completed the great Scots translator's work by translating the *Quart Livre* and *Cinquième Livre* (1694).

39. Jean Céard, "Remarques sur le vocabulaire médical de Rabelais," in *La Langue de Rabelais, la Langue de Montaigne, Actes du colloque de Rome 2003*, ed. J. Céard and F. Giaccone, *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 48 (2009): 61–73, 64, 65.

pre-existing word.⁴⁰ Forty years later, Peter-Anthony Motteux, translating the *Quart Livre*, omitted the anatomical reference to the pericardium in chapter 27 and simply translated as “and my heart still trembles within me” Rabelais’s much more expressive “encore me frissonne et tremble le coeur dedans sa capsule.” The translator — who was a French Huguenot exile — appears to have taken the view that the emphasis in the passage was not on the physiological and considered the anatomical reference to be purely metaphorical. Yet, in eschewing the physiological in his rendering and in treating it purely as a figure of speech, Motteux also played down the essential role of the body in the representation of emotion in the Rabelaisian text.

In Rabelais’s case, it is clear that the pericardium in which Epistemon’s heart trembles has to be taken literally as a serious attempt to convey the gravity and nobility of an emotion through the precise description of its physiological and anatomical manifestation. The interiority that interests Rabelais is itself material, in so far as it is the physiological processes that manifest emotion; indeed, rather than talking about a psychology of Rabelaisian characters, one might refer to a phenomenology of emotion that derives in part from the physician’s knowledge of anatomy and physiology and that seeks to make these usually invisible processes visible for the reader; the importance of the organs in the description of emotions attests to the importance of the material in Rabelais’s representation of the self. Psychological characterization in Rabelais is, however, highly complex and encompasses both an anatomist’s perspective and a philosophical reflection on the link between the physical and the spiritual which ultimately raises the question of Rabelais’s conception of the relationship between the body and the soul. But to address these questions, it is necessary first to consider the impact of his medical background on the very specific place given, in his narratives, to the body in the representation of emotional states.

The impact of Rabelais’s medical background on his representation of emotion

The publication of Rabelais’s first book, *Pantagruel*, in 1532, came two years after he became a bachelor of medicine. He was, by then, working as a physician at the

40. See Agnieszka Steczowicz’s literary analysis of Rabelais’s use of the doublet, in particular in relation to new advances in medicine: “‘Doctrine moult paradoxe et nouvelle’: Linguistic and Medical Innovation in Rabelais’s *Tiers Livre*,” *French Studies* 61.4 (2007): 423–33.

Hôtel-Dieu in Lyon. By the time Rabelais published his *Tiers Livre* in 1546, he had received his doctor's degree and had lectured at the University of Montpellier on the ancient physicians. Importantly, he undertook dissections at a time when the University of Paris was yet to authorize them, and advocated their use in medical teaching. The verb *anatomiser* itself is a Rabelaisian neologism, found for the first time in French in Rabelais's *Quart Livre*.⁴¹

The core of Rabelais's medical teaching was principally based on a careful reading and analysis of Hippocratic and Galenic treatises. The publication of the first Aldine edition of Galen and Hippocrates in 1525/1526 led to a flourish of new Latin translations that aimed to correct the errors in the medieval ones. These publications greatly contributed to the development of a new model for Renaissance physicians, and led to a greater understanding of the importance of anatomy.⁴² As early as July 1532, Rabelais himself published a medical textbook, intended for his students' use, that presented together four Hippocratic treatises: the *Aphorisms*, *Pronostics*, *The Nature of Man*, and *The Regimen of Acute Diseases*, followed by Galen's *Medical Art*.⁴³

An excellent Hellenist, he was able to return to the original texts of Hippocrates and Galen⁴⁴ and to present them to his students, freed from the mistranslations or imprecision that successive editions and commentaries had accumulated over time. As Antonioli has shown, Rabelais did not retranslate the Greek texts, but the impressive volume of very detailed and vastly erudite notes that resulted from his incessant comparisons between the Greek manuscripts and their translations amounted in many cases to a new translation. Rabelais's humanist commitment to finding the best possible translation for the

41. *Quart Livre*, 30 (608).

42. See Vivian Nutton, "The Fortunes of Galen," in *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, ed. R. J. Hankinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 368–74.

43. *Hippocratis ac Galeni libri aliquot, ex recognitione Francisci Rabelaesi, medici omnibus numeris absolutissimi* (Lyon: Gryphe, 1532). See Antonioli, 78–79. See Caroline Magdelaine, "Rabelais éditeur d'Hippocrate," in *Lire les médecins grecs à la Renaissance. Aux origines de l'édition médicale*, Actes du colloque international de Paris, 19–20 septembre 2003, ed. Véronique Boudon-Millot and Guy Cobolet (Paris: BIUM Paris 5 et CNRS Paris 4, De Boccard Edition Diffusion, 2004), 61–84, 61–63.

44. Regarding the attribution of the marginal annotations found in the 1525 edition of Galen's *Opera Omnia* owned by Rabelais, see J. Plattard, "Le Galien de Rabelais à la bibliothèque de Sheffield," *Revue du seizième siècle*, 13 (1926): 303–04; and Vivian Nutton, "Rabelais' copy of Galen," in *Études Rabelaisiennes* 22 (1988): 181–88. Romain Menini disagrees with part of Nutton's conclusions; see *Rabelais altérateur: "Graeciser en François"* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 1032.

Greek texts is also clear from the prevalence, among the Greek authors' books that he is known to have owned, of editions that comprised the original text in Greek, sometimes accompanied by its translation.⁴⁵

This medical and anatomical knowledge pervades Rabelais's narrative on a number of different levels. The chronology of the works' publication also reflects Rabelais's growing familiarity with the Greeks' medical treatises. Claude La Charité showed in particular that there is an increasing number of Hippocratic references from *Pantagruel* to the *Quart Livre*, especially to the *Epidemies* in the latter.⁴⁶ However, in his books, medical references are not primarily educational: they are predominantly poetic and heuristic and, consequently, offer important insights into the structures informing the author's thought and representations. We have already noted the comic anatomical references found in the epic battle scenes and in the fantastic litany of Quaresmeprenant's anatomy.⁴⁷ On a more serious level, Rabelais's championing of anatomy is reflected in the famous letter written by Gargantua to his son at the outset of *Pantagruel*, in which he outlines a hugely ambitious humanistic curriculum: "Puis songneusement revisite les livres des mediciens Grecz, Arabes, et Latins, sans contemner les Thalmudistes, et Cabalistes, et par frequentes anatomies acquiers toy parfaicte congnoissance de l'autre monde, qui est l'homme."⁴⁸ The notion of the body as microcosm is central to Renaissance thought, as expounded, in particular, in the works of Paracelsus.⁴⁹ Furthermore, from a historical point of view, the discovery of a

45. Claude La Charité traced the Hippocratic editions used by Rabelais in order to study the impact of paratextual elements on his interpretation of these texts: see "La bibliothèque hippocratique de Rabelais dans *Gargantua*, l'*Almanach* de 1535, le *Tiers livre* et le *Cinquiesme livre*," in *Les Labyrinthes de l'esprit. Collections et bibliothèques à la Renaissance*, ed. Rosanna Gorris-Camos et Alexandre Vanautgaerden (Genève, Droz, 2015), 45–74. See also Menini, *Rabelais altérateur*, "Appendice — La bibliothèque grecque de Rabelais," 1027–37.

46. Claude La Charité, "Rabelais lecteur d'Hippocrate dans le *Quart Livre*," in *Langue et sens du Quart Livre. Actes du colloque organisé à Rome en novembre 2011*, ed. Franco Giacone (Paris: Classiques Garnier, coll. "Les mondes de Rabelais," no. 1 (2012): 233–68. See in particular p. 238 for a detailed review of the Hippocratic editions used by Rabelais. See also p. 239 for an analysis of the various commentaries that Rabelais used in the annotations of his edition of Hippocrates and Galen.

47. See also the startling description of Gargantua's birth, in *Gargantua*, 6 (20–22).

48. *Pantagruel*, 8 (245).

49. See Walter Pagel, "Religious Motives in the Medical Biology of the Seventeenth Century," in *Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine*, ed. Marianne Winder (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 87–121, 102.

“new world” and the naming of its parts also offered a striking parallel to the contemporary advances made in anatomy and the naming of newly discovered organs in the human body.⁵⁰ The idea that the knowledge of the world hinges on the knowledge of man — and that discovering the inside of the human body is essential to that knowledge — is central to the Rabelaisian text, as reflected in Gargantua’s letter. As Yves Hersant remarks, in the Renaissance the discoveries of anatomy were bound to have an impact on man’s self-knowledge and the notion of self:

The opening of the body was not merely a medical act, but an artistic and philosophical one too, governed by the maxim “know yourself”—hence the theoretical and practical importance of anatomy [...]. As Erasmus and Rabelais advocated with regard to the Sileni, objects needed to be opened, veils torn, the visible incised to find the truth and its treasures.⁵¹

However, highlighting the traces of dominant discourses and representations of the body in a given text is complex and demands that one proceed with caution; as Gail Paster emphasizes in the introduction to her study of the body in early modern English drama:

It would be naïve to argue that bodies at any given moment in a complex culture are understood socially or felt experientially in only one way. But [...] we may theorize a decisive uniformity that is to be understood not merely as part of the order of nature [...] but as part of the order of culture.⁵²

In Rabelais’s case, pinpointing this “decisive uniformity” appears to be particularly tricky. Rabelais’s writings reflect the conceptions of an age still dominated by the paradigm of a humoral body and a self governed by humours. But the depiction of the relationship among brain, emotion, and body is a clear marker of an ongoing evolution in Rabelaisian thinking. Only three references to the

50. Raphael Cuir, *The Development of the Study of the Anatomy, from the Renaissance to Cartesianism* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2009), 1–5.

51. Yves Hersant, Introduction to Cuir, vii.

52. Gail Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 4–5.

“cerveau” are found in the first two books (published respectively in 1532 and 1534 or 1535); each time, the brain is taken to be a fairly basic organ which can easily “feel” aggrieved if bothered by either the troublesome cacophony of church bells or particularly abstract religious controversies, and which can be purged in the same way as the intestines — the metaphor which is used to describe it, “les tripes du cerveau,” drawing on the convolutions found in both. In the *Tiers Livre* (1543) and *Quart Livre* (1548), however, much more detailed and complex references are to be found, perhaps reflecting the author’s greater familiarity with the Galenic texts at that point. It is also in the *Quart Livre* that the process of remembering is described with much greater precision, pointing to a deepening reflection on the relation between emotion and the brain. Yet, it would be an anachronism to read this evolution as a prefiguration of the modern representation of the brain as the centre of emotion. Rabelais, as a reader of Galen, is chiefly interested in the brain as the seat of the soul which gives life to the body and maintains it there. Thus, Rabelais’s reflection on emotion and the body offers a telling perspective into his thinking on the nature of life itself, which for him, is situated at the intersection between the material and the immaterial, the body and the soul. Furthermore, Rabelais’s essentially Galenic conception of emotion and the soul is informed at one and the same time by a semi-materialist representation of the soul influenced by ancient models of medicine and natural philosophy and by Christian dogma regarding the immateriality and immortality of the soul (which Rabelais was careful not to contradict).

Emotion and the spirits: at the intersection between the material and the immaterial

Emotions, as the Rabelaisian narrator reminds us repeatedly, are matters of life and death — one can die as a consequence of laughter or of the surprise caused by unexpected, sudden events. These sudden and dramatic changes to physiological processes are explained essentially by the role played by the spirits in maintaining life in the body. The spirits (*pneumata*) are complex elements that are both material and immaterial: they are semi-material substances produced and refined in organs such as the liver and the heart which, in the last stage of the process, are further refined through repetitive cycles of production and distillation from vital into animal spirits, which then enter the brain and, from there, are sent via the nerves to the entire body to give life and movement to the

limbs.⁵³ The theory of the spirits that informs Rabelais's representation accounts, to a large extent, for the notion of a material substrate in emotion that can very directly impact on bodily processes. In chapter 10 of *Gargantua*, for example, a precise physiological depiction of the effects of joy on the body is supported by an explicit reference to Galen:⁵⁴

Car comme le blanc exterieurement disgrege et espart la veue, dissolvent manifestement les espritz visifz, [...] tout ainsi le cueur par joye excellente est interieurement espart et patist manifeste resolution des esperitz vitaulx. Laquelle tant peut estre acree: que le cueur demoureroit spolié de son entretien, et par consequent seroit la vie estaincte, par ceste perichairie comme dict Galen [...].⁵⁵

And laughter itself, which features so prominently in Rabelais's text, gets its own physiological description: "Ensemble eulx, commença rire maistre Janotus, à qui mieulx, mieulx, tant que les larmes leurs venoient es yeulx: par la vehemente concution de la substance du cerveau: à laquelle furent exprimées ces humiditez lachrymales, et transcoullées jouxte les nerfz optiques."⁵⁶ In both of the foregoing examples, the reader is struck by the precision with which the material

53. The *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* is of particular importance: see de Lacy, ed., *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, part 1, books 3, 8, 31 (89), and part 2, books 7, 3, 19–28 (445–46). See also Rafael Mandressi's commentary on how Galen himself reinterpreted Erasistratus's theory of spirits mixing with pneuma in the lungs before they reached the brain, in *Le Regard de l'anatomiste: dissections et inventions du corps en Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 86–88.

54. The reference to Galen is particularly complex here: the passage follows on from the narration of an anecdote told by Xenophon in the *Anabasis* and referred to by Galen in *De usu partium*, in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG), ed. Kühn, 3, book 10, 775 and 777, but the word "perichairie" (excessive joy) corresponding to the Greek περιχαρία / περιχάρεια, which Rabelais uses here, does not appear anywhere in Galen's works, as confirmed by searching the TLG. The word can be found in the works of the Church Fathers (Origen). The passage must also be read in reference to Galen's *Quod Animi Mores Corporis Temperamenta sequuntur*, where he demonstrates that the soul is affected by the temperament of the body, a theory that raises the question of the possible materiality of the soul, which could explain the sympathy by which the soul is affected by material processes within the body. Galen raises the question but carefully avoids answering it. See in particular Galien, *Les facultés de l'âme suivent les tempéraments du corps*, 77–79 and 82–83.

55. *Gargantua*, 10 (32–33).

56. *Gargantua*, 20 (53).

processes of laughter are described by Rabelais: the body is represented as an ever-changing form, subject to external and internal processes of dilatation, resolution, liquefaction, and so forth that may, in extreme cases, rob it of its essential life forces. Emotions such as joy and mirth may in themselves have the power to influence the physiological processes through which life is breathed into and maintained in the body.

As a physician, Rabelais had a very specific reason to take such a passionate interest in the question; always looking for ways to restore or conserve emotional or humoral balance in his patients, he was particularly interested in understanding the processes through which emotions impacted on the body. The Rabelaisian author-narrator frequently refers to himself in the books' prologues as a physician who has dedicated himself to the enjoyment and entertainment of his patient (i.e., the reader), striving to rouse in him a gaiety and lightness of heart that he considers to be central to the restoration or the conservation of physical health.⁵⁷ And it is precisely through the questioning of the relationship between the text and the reader — a relationship paralleled by that of the physician and his patient — that Rabelais gets to the heart of the matter in the dedicatory epistle to Odet de Chastillon that precedes the *Quart Livre*.⁵⁸

Sus un passage du pere Hippocrates on livre cy dessus allegué⁵⁹ nous
suons disputans et recherchans non si le minois du medicin chagrin,

57. Rabelais's interest in the relationship between the physician and the patient echoes ancient guidelines found in a number of Hellenistic medical treatises from the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, where detailed recommendations can be found regarding the appearance and the behaviour of the physician, see Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 158.

58. Claude La Charité notes that the Latin translation of books 1, 3 and 6 of Hippocrates's *Epidemiae*, published in 1546 by Jean Vassès, which included Galen's *Commentaria*, was dedicated to Odet de Chastillon. La Charité, "Rabelais lecteur d'Hippocrate dans le *Quart Livre*," in Giaccone, ed., *Langue et sens du Quart Livre*, 243. La Charité also remarks that the fact that Rabelais signed this epistle with his real name is a clear indication of the earnestness of his discourse on the *ethos* of the physician (244).

59. *Quart Livre*, 518, "In 6. *Epid.*," i.e., Hippocrates *Epidemiae* (*De morbis popularibus*) 6:4, 7. This passage offers a very interesting insight into the way Rabelais is able to navigate between Hippocrates and Galen and to weave together references to *Epidemiae* and to Galen's commentary on the text. He starts by expanding on Hippocrates's recommendations regarding the way the physician should behave in front of the patient, the words he should use, the clothes he should wear, etc. He then moves on to an anecdote involving the callous physician Callianax, which he takes from Galen's *Commentaria* (125–26) and quotes only partially.

tetrique, reubarbatif, Catonian, mal plaisant, mal content, severe, rechigné contriste le malade: et du medicin la face ioyeuse, seraine, gratuite, ouverte, plaisante resjouist le malade. Cela est tout esprouvé et trescertain.⁶⁰

But what remains to be seen, as Rabelais points out, is

si telles contristations et esjouissemens proviennent par apprehension du malade contemplant ces qualitez en son medicin, et par icelles conjecturant l'issue & catastrophe de son mal ensuivre: sçavoir est par les joyeuses joyeuse et désirée, par les fascheuses fascheuse et abhorrente. Ou par transfusion des esperitz serains ou tenebreux: aërez ou terrestres, joyeux ou melancholicques du medicin en la persone du malade. Comme est l'opinion de Platon, et Averrois.⁶¹

The reference to the Galenic “esperitz” here is a typically ambivalent evocation of what would eventually become the immaterial mind but still is, at the time when Rabelais is writing, imbued with materialist conceptions of a semi-material intermediary between the body and the soul. The passage clearly also draws on Ficinian representations of the transfusion of the spirits from one body to another. In his medico-philosophical treatise on love, *De Amore*, the Florentine philosopher describes the contagious fascination exerted by the beloved over the lover in strikingly material terms, as a transfer of the lover’s spirits into the beloved’s body: the spirits — constituted of a vapour of fine droplets produced by an evaporation of the blood — rise to the brain through the gazing eyes of the lover, before reaching the surface of the beloved’s eyes; there, through a process akin to condensation, the spirits are able to enter the beloved’s bloodstream and to poison his heart with the same fascinated attraction.⁶² The transfusion of spirits between the physician and his patient referred to by Rabelais in the above passage can be seen as a variation on the process described by Ficino; it certainly draws on similar materialist representations. However, Rabelais is careful to avoid a purely materialist description of the spirits; despite the reference to

60. *Quart Livre*, 518.

61. *Quart Livre*, 518–19. The references to Plato and Averroes correspond to *Republic*, 3:409a and Averroes, *De re medica*, books 3 and 8. See Huchon’s note in the *Oeuvres complètes*: 1482n2.

62. Marsilio Ficino, *De Amore*, speech 7, chapter 9.

eminent authors such as Averroes and Plato, who supported this materialist view, he eventually scored out the passage in the second version of the prologue that he wrote four years later. Yet, his interest in the physiological aspects of emotion is clearly steeped in a wider reflection on the intersection between the material and the immaterial which goes beyond the question of the nature and communication of emotions, and ultimately addresses the question of the nature of the soul, and of life itself — a question that hinges on the theory of the spirits.

One can readily see the appeal, for both physicians and philosophers in the Renaissance, of the notion of spirits — a material substance imbued with an immaterial, life-giving force. Galen's system appeared to be compatible with the Christian representation of a body that owes its life to a divine soul manifesting the immanent presence of the divine within the material, earthly body. And indeed, in a recent study, Hiro Hirai⁶³ has shown how the contemporary physician Jean Fernel's interpretation of Galen in his medico-philosophical work *On the Hidden Causes of Things* (1548) attempted to reconcile the theories of Galen with the Christian faith, through a Platonic and Ficinian reading of his doctrine. Rabelais, as an avid reader and teacher of Galen, obviously draws on the latter's work to develop his own thinking about the nature of the soul but, rather than try to reconcile ancient natural philosophy with Christian dogma, as a literary writer he enriches his prose by borrowing vivid images and metaphors from these ancient sources. For Rabelais, the relationship between the soul and the body is essential and organic; feeding the body is, quite literally, feeding the soul, as a passage in chapter 13 of *Tiers Livre* demonstrates. Pantagruel advises Panurge to have nothing more than a light supper of fruit before bedtime in order to prepare his mind to welcome clear and meaningful dreams. However, while Pantagruel refers here to the *doxa* according to which the soul cannot attain a state of contemplation if the body is weighed down by rich foods, he almost immediately turns it on its head to condemn strenuously the most extreme forms of fasting diets, likening the spirit in a body deprived of food to a tethered bird of prey and emphasizing, though a graphic evocation of the effects of hunger, the essential link between the nourishment of the soul and the nourishment of the body:

63. Hiro Hirai, "Alter Galenus: Jean Fernel et son interprétation platonico-chrétienne de Galien," *Early Science and Medicine* 10 (2005): 1–35.

car la faim estoit on corps: pour à laquelle remedier, abaye l'estomach, la veue esblouist, les venes sugcent de la propre substance des membres carniformes: et retirent en bas cestuy esprit vaguabond, negligent du traitement de son nourrisson et hoste naturel, qui est le corps: comme si l'oizeau sus le poing estant vouloit en l'aër son vol prendre, et incontinent par les longes seroit plus bas deprimé.⁶⁴

The image of the life substance being sucked back from the extremities of the body to its gaping centre, the empty stomach, forcefully illustrates the material link that Rabelais envisages between the spirit and the body: the body as “natural host” of the spirit is not a passive abode but constitutes, with the spirit, a system in which the body sustains life and, therefore, the spirit within the body; yet hunger shows, in the most convincing way, that the life of the spirit is dependent on the nourishment of the body. Only the refining processes by which the body distills the food that is being given to it allow for the deployment of the spirit; one could even argue that, as described by Rabelais, the spirit appears to be literally born out of the distillation processes involved in the material nourishment of the body, since an interruption in the supply of this nourishment causes it to retract and be pulled back into the centre of the body.

The same notion of distillation is found in the Galenic theory of the animal spirits, or psychic spirits of the soul, which particularly seem to fascinate Rabelais. Galen describes the process whereby vital spirits, which originate in the heart and maintain life throughout the body, are transformed and refined into animal spirits before they reach the brain. As Galen writes, such a distillation process is necessary for the spirits to attain an extremely light and aerated form which can then fill the ventricles of the brain and, from there, make their way back towards the limbs following the nerves' trajectory. Rabelais, following Galen, situates this very process in the *rete mirabile* (the marvellous net), an intricate web of arteries and blood vessels found, in certain animals, at the base of the brain, which Galen wrongly assumed to be present also in humans. Galen's hypothesis drew on a potent analogy between the production of the animal spirits and that of maternal milk or semen:

64. *Tiers Livre*, 13 (390).

If nature, needing to fashion semen and milk with precision, even though they are far inferior in power to psychic pneuma, nevertheless contrived for them a lengthy stay in the organs of coction and for that reason provided for semen the spiral before the testes and for milk the length of the vessels that go to the breasts, it is reasonable that also, when making psychic from vital pneuma in the brain, it constructed close to the brain a complex labyrinth, so to speak, the retiform web.⁶⁵

Vesalius dismissed the existence of a *rete mirabile* in man in *De Fabrica* (1543); yet at the time he antagonized many of his peers by daring to contradict Galen, and it was not until the eighteenth century that the *rete mirabile* disappeared from anatomical manuals.⁶⁶ Rabelais either missed or — like many of his contemporaries — chose to ignore Vesalius's conclusions; he thus describes “(le) retz admirable, on quel se terminent les arteres: les quelles de la senestre armoire du cœur prenoient leur origine, et les espritz vitaux affinoient en longs ambages, pour estre faictz animaux.”⁶⁷ In spite of the anatomical error on which it was based, it is quite possible to see why the *rete mirabile* never ceased to fascinate Rabelais and many of his contemporaries, as well as later thinkers and writers: the mysterious distillation process appears to be a fitting and forceful metaphor, an emblematic representation of the intricate relationship between the material and the immaterial in the body and self. It could even be argued that Rabelais's evident fascination with the mysterious process points at the very least to a temptation to equate the soul with the animal spirits and to see, in the distillation of the animal spirits, the origin of the soul itself.

But while Galen's influence on Rabelais is fundamental, the latter's reflection on the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body also needs to be contextualized within a contemporary philosophical and religious debate, originating in scholastic philosophy, about the faculties of the soul — the powers that enable the soul to exert its action through the various senses (sensory, vegetative, locomotive, or intellectual). Although scholastic philosophy separated the soul from its faculties, the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a

65. *On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, part 2, books 7, 3, 29 (447).

66. Mandressi, 86–88.

67. *Tiers Livre*, 31 (451).

conflicting discourse that considered, as Katharine Park writes, the faculties to be constitutive of the soul itself:

Over the course of the sixteenth century more and more philosophers without any specific commitment to the *via moderna* began to move towards an assertion of the identity of the soul and its faculties and a corresponding emphasis on the organs of the body as the key to psychological function below the level of intellection.⁶⁸

Rabelais's works appear to reflect this shift towards an identification between the soul and its faculties, as well as offering a deepening reflection on the role of the organs in emotion and the material processes that link the body and the soul. The espousal of Galenic theories of the *pneumata*/spirits is consistent with Rabelais's keen interest, as anatomist, in the invisible and immensely complex physiological processes taking place within the living body. Like Galen, Rabelais wishes to give visual expression to the unseen processes that make up life itself by tracing them right back into the microcosm of the human body, peeling away its skin to reveal not the livid entrails of a corpse in the anatomical theatre, but the living body as never seen before, in all the complexity of life's mechanisms. Ultimately, this leads Rabelais to reflect on the nature of life itself, at the intersection between the material and the immaterial; between the conception of a soul that is — according to the overriding religious discourse of his time — supposed to be immaterial and immortal, and the notion of a semi-material soul manifesting itself in the body through the action of the spirits. In the same way as Renaissance anatomy treatises represent the *écorchés* as living beings, Rabelais's anatomical descriptions of emotion and the faculties of the soul reveal his fascination with a mystery that dissections themselves are powerless to unveil: the origin and the nature of life.

68. Katharine Park, "The Organic Soul," in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. B. Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 464–84, 478.